

OF CLAYTONSVILLE, PA



THE MYSTERY CREATURE

INTRODUCTION

"Often they [UFOs] project powerful searchlight-like beams toward the ground. Persons caught in these beams undergo remarkable changes in personality. Their IQ skyrockets, they change their jobs, divorce their wives, and in any number of well-documented instances they suddenly rise above their previously mediocre lives and become outstanding statesmen, scientists, poets and writers, even soldiers."

- - John Keel, ***The Mothman Prophecies***

That summer, our small town deep in rural Pennsylvania was abuzz with strange tales of the supernatural creature. No two stories of the creature entirely agreed with each other. Everyone who encountered the creature seemed to see what they needed to see.

Some who found the creature were terrified. Others were spurred out of their stifling, mundane lives. In the end, the creature left the town with more questions than answers. But the lives of the each witness would each be changed forever.

Once the stories started, they came in more and more frequently throughout the year. Then just as they reached a crescendo, the encounters suddenly stopped.

The Mystery Creature of Claytonsville, PA is a roleplaying game by Nick Wedig for 1-7 players. It's a story about a town gripped by an unexplained, ambiguous phenomenon. As the story spreads, it brings out the unconscious fears and desires hidden beneath the town's quiet exterior.

You can play the game as a self contained story of a single protagonist in 4-6 hours. Or you can play the game as an anthology of intertwined stories, in an ongoing series of indefinite length, played across multiple sessions of play.

You'll need a deck of 52 regular playing cards to play, with jokers.



STRUCTURE

- If you're playing an ongoing series, begin by **Creating the Town**.
- At the start of each episode, you **Create the Protagonist**.
- The rest of the episode consists of scenes.
- You will each take turns playing the Protagonist as they have a weird encounter with the Mystery Creature. The protagonist role rotates clockwise after each scene
- The other players are Oracles for different issues important to the game: the **Town**, the **Creature**, the **Heart's Desires** and the **World's Weight**. These players help frame the scene and ask leading questions related to their topic.
- These responsibilities are distributed randomly.
- Each scene has the chance to push the protagonist closer to one of 4 potential fates. At the start of the scene, draw a face card, and that is what is at stake in the scene.
- During a scene, you freely roleplay, until a ritual phrase is invoked, or until all Oracles have asked their leading questions for the scene.
- "That might not be so easy" has a player draw and answer a question about how the protagonist succeeds or fails.
- Once all 4 oracles asked a question, the scene should be wrapped up.
- Then it is decided if the scene made that fate more or less likely. If yes, a face card is put in the center of the table. 3 cards of the same suit means that ending has come true.
- Once their ending is determined, everyone collaborates to decide how it goes.
- If playing an ongoing series, note any changes to the town or the relationship map caused through play. Next session, make a new protagonist indirectly tied to the current one.



THE STORY PALETTE

YES

Encouraged to include these things

OFFSCREEN

People can refer to these or see the consequences, but we'll never spend time imagining these in detail

AMBIGUOUS

These topics are left deliberately uncertain, vague or contradictory.

The True Nature of the Mystery Creature

NO

These topics won't occur in the fiction at all, even offscreen. It's just not a topic we'll deal with this game.



CREATE THE TOWN

Deal 5 cards out, go around choosing a card, answering the associated question. Discard that card and draw a new one.

If you have 5 or fewer players, go around a second time. In the second round, every player should answer a question of the opposite color, if there is one available.

If you have one or two players, answer more questions until you have answered 6 or more questions.

It is possible to answer the same question twice, so long as each answer gives more information and the two answers don't contradict each other.

RED = THE TOWN

- A How is the existing order in town unjust or harmful to its citizens?
- 2 What is this town most proud of?
- 3 What is the primary type of business in town?
- 4 What better days has this town seen, and why are they now long gone?
- 5 Who has power or authority in town?
- 6 How is this town rundown, ramshackle, decaying or falling apart?
- 7 What old grudges still create modern squabbles among the town's residents?
- 8 What is a major landmark in town?
- 9 What is the current controversy or civic debate that consumes local politics?
- 10 What is the scenery or environment like in the town?
- J What tragedy or misfortune has left a scar on this town that will never heal?
- Q How does the town construct a positive facade to hide its darker side?
- K What terrible truth is the town unwilling to acknowledge?
- Joker The table works as a group to create a question about the town, based on what is already established, and you answer it.

BLACK = CREATURE

- A What terrible fate befalls the victims of the creature?
- 2 What terrifying form does the creature take?
- 3 What unusual behavior does the creature perform?
- 4 Who was the first person to encounter the creature?
- 5 What local legend is the creature tied to?
- 6 Where has the creature been seen most often?
- 7 How has encountering the creature been a surprisingly positive experience for its victims?
- 8 What mundane explanation do the authorities give for sightings of the creature?
- 9 What supernatural phenomena do people associate with seeing the creature?
- 10 What outlandish conspiracy theories or urban legends do people connect the creature to?
- J Why is it impossible for the stories about the creature to be true?
- Q What evidence is there of the creature's existence?
- K How does the creature remind the town of its own worst nature?
- Joker You ask the table a leading question, based on what has already been established, and they work as a group to answer it.

CREATE THE PROTAGONIST

Deal 5 cards out, go around choosing a card, answering the associated question. Discard that card and draw a new one.

If you have 5 or fewer players, go around a second time. In the second round, every player should answer a question of the opposite color, if there is one available.

If you have one or two players, answer more questions until you have answered 6 or more questions.

It is possible to answer the same question twice, so long as each answer gives more information and the two answers don't contradict each other.

RED = HOPES

- A Who lives the life that you wish you had?
- 2 Where do you dream of escaping this town to go live instead?
- 3 Whose love or respect do you desire? Why won't they give it to you?
- 4 What unusual belief sets you apart in your town?
- 5 Who do you want to become? What prevents you being that person?
- 6 If you could change one aspect of your life, what would it be?
- 7 What idiosyncratic hobby do you enjoy, that very few people in town understand?
- 8 What aspect of your life lets you escape, briefly, the stress of your life?
- 9 Whose help do you need to achieve your goals? Why won't they give it to you?
- 10 What holds you back, preventing you from achieving your dreams?
- J Who in town likes and supports you?
- Q What do you desire that you would never admit to anyone else?
- K What secret do you hide in your heart? Why can't you reveal it?

BLACK = BURDENS

- A What mundane fear controls your life?
- 2 What everyday obligation keeps you in town?
- 3 What marginalization or prejudice do you experience in your town? (Caution! Check in with your fellow players when answering.)
- 4 Why are you dissatisfied with your life?
- 5 How are you an outsider in the town you live in?
- 6 What tragedy from your past still haunts you?
- 7 What undesirable role have you been forced into playing in your life?
- 8 What problematic coping mechanism do you use to deal with the stress of your life?
- 9 How is your internal life more difficult than others around you realize?
- 10 How will your life get worse if you don't act soon?
- J Who in town is the source of the most stress for you?
- Q Who in town has a demand that you can't ignore?
- K How are your mind and soul vulnerable?

FINAL PREPARATIONS

CREATE THE DECKS

Remove the four Aces from the deck. Shuffle these into an Authority deck. If you have 4 or 7 players, include 2 Jokers in the Authority deck. If you have 6 players, include 1 Joker.

Take the face cards. Separate the face cards by rank. Shuffle the Jacks and Queens together as well. Without looking, take 3 of those cards, shuffle them into the 4 kings. Then place the remaining Jacks and Queens on top of the facedown pile of Kings, making one draw deck with the Kings near the bottom.

Take the remaining cards and shuffle them into the Difficulty deck.

FATES

As a group, decide on four potential fates for the protagonist. Each fate should be tied to one of the suits, and to what that suit symbolizes. So a Spades fate symbolizes something bizarre, supernatural, Hearts means achieving something you want, or at least a part of it, or doing something tied into that. A Diamonds fate is usually your life getting worse, while a Clubs fate is being stuck in an inescapable, never changing status quo.

For now, leave these fates broad and vague. Just get a basic idea. As you play, you'll flesh them out.

EXAMPLE FATES

HEARTS

- Escape this stifling small town and pursue life as an artist or musician
- Begin a romantic relationship with a mysterious stranger
- Get revenge on the jerks down at the bait shop for wrecking my boat

DIAMONDS

- Having your darkest secrets exposed
- Your business goes bankrupt, leaving you destitute
- You fail out of school and wind up kicked out of your parent's house

CLUBS

- Trapped in a soulless job and a loveless marriage, no hope of escape
- Spending the rest of your life caring for an aging parent
- Losing the election for city council

SPADES

- Disappearing mysteriously in the night
- Having all your memories altered
- Being trapped in a mirror world, dreamscape or children's storybook



FRAMING SCENES

At the beginning of each scene, pass the card for the Protagonist player to the player on the left of the last Protagonist player.

Then take the aces of each suit, add some jokers (enough that it will divide evenly between the non-protagonist players). Shuffle and deal them out evenly between the non-protagonist players.

2 players - Protagonist player draws one ace, other player takes 3 aces

3 players - two non-protagonist players each take 2 aces

4 players - deal 2 cards (aces or jokers) to each non-protagonist

5 players - deal 1 ace to each non-protagonist

6 players - deal 1 card (ace or joker) to each non-protagonist

7 players - deal 1 card (ace or joker) to each non-protagonist

Draw a face card to determine what is at stake in the scene. Whoever has the Authority that matches that face card will add a detail to the fate (“Ted will be sent to Military school” becomes “Ted will be sent to military school unless he passes his history exam” becomes “Ted will be sent to military school tomorrow unless he passes his history exam”), and decide the central question of the scene. This is what is at stake in the scene. (“What do they find in the abandoned military supply depot outside of town?”) advance toward that fate, and the Ace player should try to make that fact known in the context of the scene if at all possible.

At the end of the scene, they will decide whether the face card is left face up on the table (if the scene makes the fate more likely) or if the card is placed on the bottom of the fate deck (if the scene makes the fate less likely).

Each Ace player will add one detail when framing the scene, using their authority. Each authority has a specific question to answer in framing the scene.

♣ **Town**

“Where does this scene happen?”

◇ **Weight of the World**

“Who is present in the scene?”

♠ **Creature**

“What is supernatural, creepy, dreamlike or strange about this scene?”

♥ **What the Heart Wants**

Choose one:

“What does the protagonist hope will happen in the scene?”

or

“What is happening in the first few seconds of the scene?”

THAT MIGHT NOT BE SO EASY

RED = SUCCESS

- 2 Why do you need someone's help to accomplish this? Whose?
- 3 How do you make an enemy in the process of performing this deed?
- 4 What makes you rethink your plan and choose a different course of action?
- 5 Who is harmed in performing this task?
- 6 What surprising information do they discover as you succeed this task?
- 7 What do you lose, damage or destroy in the process?
- 8 What terrible sacrifice must you make to succeed?
- 9 How do they succeed through blind luck or random chance?
- 10 How do you get what you want, but too much of it, so that it is a problem?

Draw a card from the Difficulty deck. Each card rank has a question then to answer. The person whose authority that matches the suit answers the question or, optionally, in a 3+ player game, they consult the oracles.

*DIFFICULTY
DECK*

DISCARDS

BLACK = FAILURE

- 2 What prevents you from accomplishing your task?
- 3 How does your failure gain you a new friend or ally?
- 4 What interrupts this task, before you can succeed or fail?
- 5 How does your failure lead to injury or ruin? For Whom?
- 6 How does your failure reveal valuable information?
- 7 Who is helped by your failure?
- 8 How does failure at the task cause something unrelated to o surprisingly well?
- 9 How does blind luck or random chance prevent accomplishing the task?
- 10 What inexplicable supernatural event prevents you from succeeding?



HEARTS

WHAT YOU DESIRE

In a scene, your job is to make sure the scene reveals the inner thoughts of the protagonist, that it centers their emotions and desires and their struggle for self-actualization. The Town and the World will try to prevent the protagonist achieving their dreams. You're just trying to make the protagonist's desires important in the story, whether they succeed or fail.. It's just as interesting to see the protagonist seeking their dreams and failing as it is them succeeding.

Introduce NPCs that tie into their hopes and dreams. Present the protagonist with opportunities to seek their goals, but also introduce obstacles to that quest. When paranormal stuff happens, try to find ways to make it represent or reveal hidden desires, perhaps in some warped or twisted way. Is the creature just a manifestation of the protagonist's subconscious desires? Maybe, if you push for that.

FATE NOTES

SPOTLIGHT

Once during the scene, you should turn to another player (perhaps the protagonist player, perhaps someone who we haven't heard much from this scene) and ask them this question:

“What is [name a character] really feeling in this moment?”

Once they have answered this question in sufficient detail for you to be satisfied, turn your Ace face down.



DIAMOND

WORLDLY CONCERNS

In a scene, your job is to make sure the scene shows the stresses and mundane fears that govern the protagonist's life. This is a story about ordinary people crushed by the world until they experience something bizarre and strange that breaks them out of their stifling mundane lives. Your job this scene is to be that stifling life. You're the social pressure, fear about the water bill, and societal disapproval, anything that keeps people doing what they hate, because they fear any other life would be worse.

Introduce NPCs that prevent the protagonist from achieving their hopes and dreams, or who threaten what the protagonist has, or who make demands the protagonist cannot ignore. Create obstacles in their path, and things to fear if they try something different. When paranormal stuff happens, try to find ways to make it represent their fears and concerns, perhaps in some warped or twisted way. Is the creature just a manifestation of the protagonist's fears and worries? Maybe, if you push for that.

FATE NOTES

SPOTLIGHT

Once during the scene, you should turn to another player (perhaps the protagonist player, perhaps someone who we haven't heard much from this scene) and ask them this question:

“What is preventing the protagonist from achieving their goals?”

Once they have answered this question in sufficient detail for you to be satisfied, turn your Ace face down.

CLUBS

THE TOWN

FATE NOTES

In a scene, your job is to make sure the scene illustrates the nature of the town, that details are consistent and plausible and that we explore the environment as well as the protagonist's story.

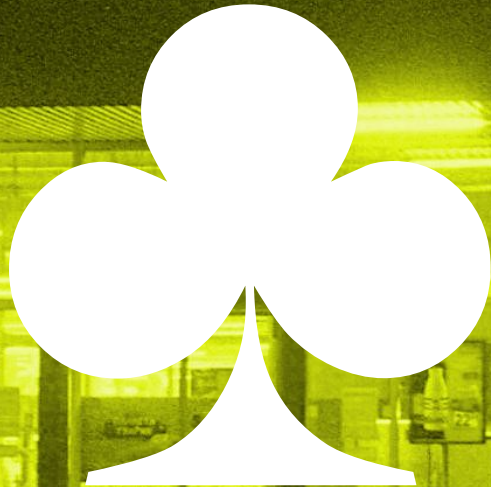
The Town is also opposed to change. Anything that rocks the boat will be opposed, whether that is a supernatural creature or a troublemaking protagonist.

Whenever there is a question, it's your responsibility to introduce NPCs and roleplay them as needed. This is especially true of NPCs whose role is to maintain the status quo. Present obstacles to change, whoever is doing it. When paranormal stuff happens, present the skeptical opposition to these wild stories. Is the creature just a some wild flight of fantasy? Maybe, if you push for that.

SPOTLIGHT

Once during the scene, you should turn to another player (perhaps the protagonist player, perhaps someone who we haven't heard much from this scene) and ask them to describe one aspect of the scene (a location, NPC in specific, sensory detail).

Once they have added enough detail to the scene for you to be satisfied, turn your Ace face down.



SPADES

THE CREATURE



In a scene, your job is to make sure the scene shows how the paranormal creeps into the protagonist's life to disrupt their routines. This is a story about ordinary people that experience something impossible that breaks them out of their stifling mundane lives. Your job this scene is to introduce the weird and bizarre. This could be the creature itself, but it could just as easily be other unexplainable phenomena that surround the creature: strange men in black that might not be human, lost time, lights in the sky, prophetic phone calls, bizarre weather phenomena, altered memories, any weird thing you can think of that makes the protagonist question their reality.

Introduce NPCs that make the protagonist question their life and beliefs.

To begin with, start small with the strange things. Save the creature in reserve until the protagonist experiences significant stress. Then unleash the weird monstrosity to push them out of their wretched, boring life.

FATE NOTES

SPOTLIGHT

Once during the scene, you should turn to another player (perhaps the protagonist player, perhaps someone who we haven't heard much from this scene) and ask them this question:

“What causes the protagonist to doubt their senses or their sense of reality?”

Once they have answered this question in sufficient detail for you to be satisfied, turn your Ace face down.

CREDITS

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If you play the game, or even just enjoyed reading it, tell me about it. I can be found at:

Email nickwedig@yahoo.com
Twitter @nickwedig1
Itch <https://nickwedig.itch.io/>
Web <http://nickwedig.libraryofhighmoon.com/>
Elsewhere <https://wheretofind.me/@nickwedig>

Inspirations: *The Mothman Prophecies* - book by John Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies* - film directed by Mark Pellington, *Paranoia Agent* - anime created by Satoshi Kon, *The Saucer Life* - podcast by Aaron Gulyas, *Kentucky Route Zero* - videogame by Cardboard Computer, “*Jose Chung’s From Outer Space*” - episode of *The X-Files* directed by Rob Bowman, *Oxenfree* - videogame by Night School Studio, *Glitch: A Story of the Not* - tabletop RPG by Jenna Moran, *Archipelago* - tabletop RPG by Matthijs Holter